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C O N F I D E N T I A L TIRANA 000433

SIPDIS

PASS TO EUR/SCE (ERIN KOTHEIMER)
BELGRADE PASS TO PODGORICA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/10/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AL](#)
SUBJECT: BERISHA DISCUSSES CONCERNS OVER MACEDONIA

Classified By: Amb. John L. Withers, II for Reasons 1.4, (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Albanian Prime Minister Berisha believes political instability in Macedonia will continue for the foreseeable future. However, he sees no deeper crisis on the horizon and believes the Macedonian leadership can eventually put the genie of ethnic nationalism back into its bottle. Berisha said Albania would continue to urge calm and moderation to ethnic Albanian politicians in Macedonia. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Ambassador met with Prime Minister Berisha on June 9 and elicited his views on recent political developments in Macedonia. The Prime Minister expressed his concerns regarding regional implications of political instability in Macedonia. Specifically, he said that Prime Minister Gruevski had reduced his political room to maneuver with Athens over the name issue and had also enflamed tensions between ethnic Albanians and Macedonians in the recent elections. Berisha said, "If you play the nationalist (ethnic) card, Albanians will play it twice. We must have peace and stability in Macedonia. If you play the nationalist card, it must be to this end." Berisha also said that the recent electoral losses by President Crvenkovski's party meant that more moderate approaches in Skopje will be eclipsed for the near term.

¶3. (C) Berisha said he saw Albania's mediating role as having a calming, moderating influence on ethnic Albanians in the region. He said he had been in contact with both Albanian ethnic party leaders in Macedonia, Thaci and Ahmeti, and had urged them to remain calm in their public statements and avoid violence. However, despite his long association with Gruevski, the Prime Minister said he lacked influence with his Macedonian counterpart on his recent political maneuverings. Berisha expressed frustration in not convincing Gruevski to eschew policies he characterized as divisive, such as Gruevski's move to change the Macedonian commission on minorities. Nonetheless, Berisha said he would maintain his consistent message of stability and moderation to Skopje. The Prime Minister also dismissed out of hand the notion that instability among ethnic Albanians in Macedonia could spill over into Albania, although he did worry about possible turbulence affecting Kosovo. Berisha said he had urged the Kosovar leadership to constructively intervene with ethnic Albanian politicians in Macedonia.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: Giving lie to some long-standing regional fears of a desire to create a "Greater Albania," Berisha is deftly following the GOA's traditional approach with its neighbors with large ethnic Albanian populations: urging calm, seeking consensus and avoiding extremism. Although Berisha's influence with Prime Minister Gruevski is limited, his eye was focused on the long-term need to encourage ethnic harmony in Macedonia in the interests of regional stability. The Prime Minister's message to the USG was that the GOA will continue its slow, patient work of engaging ethnic Albanians

in the region to foster political stability. End Comment.
WITHERS